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SUBJECT: LIKUD POWER BROKER -- AND REPUTED PARTY BULLY --
EYES JORDAN AND A MEETING WITH PRESIDENT BUSH

Classified By: Deputy Chief of Mission Richard LeBaron for reason 1.4 (b) and (d).

11. (C) Summary and Comment: Likud's outspoken rightist Central Committee member Uzi Cohen and some of his what could only be described as political henchmen presented an alternative peace plan to Poloff and Pol/FSN on March 3 wherein the Palestinians would have their own state -- in a carved-out northern portion of Jordan. Cohen touted Likud's Central Committee -- with himself as core leader -- as the real powerhouse behind Likud policy, and advocated that the USG bypass regular GOI channels and meet with Central Committee members on peace process issues. Cohen claimed that he received an unofficial "green light" from PM Sharon to promote his plan, and that Jordan's King Abdullah knows about the plan and had relayed inquiries about the plan's details. Cohen and his colleagues asserted that there is support for the plan by a majority in Likud's Central Committee, in the Knesset and among moderate Israeli Arabs. He pressed for a meeting with Ambassador Kurtzer to present the plan, and brazenly promised that he would find a way to arrange a meeting with President Bush. Comment: At worst, many within Likud and the Israeli public view Cohen as an obnoxious thug, who elbows his way into and disrupts Knesset meetings, exploits political connections for family favors, and panders to the right-wing elements of Likud. At best, he is an unabashed self-promoter. Sharon may be putting up with Cohen's shenanigans, but we have no indication that he agrees with Cohen's approach. End Summary and Comment.

Redrawing the Middle East

12. (C) Uzi Cohen, Deputy Mayor of Ra'anna, a Tel Aviv suburb, and a powerful right-wing Likud Central Committee power broker, along with several colleagues, met with Poloff and Pol/FSN March 3 in Cohen's small municipal office, plastered with photographs of Cohen and prominent Israeli political figures. The meeting was arranged in response to a letter Cohen had written to Ambassador Kurtzer requesting a meeting to "brief" the Ambassador on his "proposition for a peaceful solution of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict." Joining Cohen were Mark Gal, the author of the "peace plan;" Dr. Menahem Eldor, an attorney who interpreted for Mr. Cohen; and Shlomo Madmon, a hanger-on. (Note: It was obvious during the meeting that Eldor took liberties to expound generously on what Cohen was saying. It appeared, however, as Cohen sat back comfortably in his chair, that Cohen was confident that Eldor would represent him accurately. End note.)

13. (C) Cohen's plan, entitled "Three States for Three Nations," calls for the establishment of a Palestinian state "in a region north of Jordan," although the presentation and maps actually depicted a region in the northern part of Jordan. According to Gal, the West Bank is too small an area to accommodate all of the Palestinian refugees who would converge on an independent Palestinian state, as well as the expanding population of resident Palestinians. The area proposed in the plan would accommodate a much larger population. According to an amateurish map with hand-printed labels illustrating Cohen's plan, a large part of northern Jordan would be partitioned for the Palestinian state. A handout on the plan stated that "final borders of said state are to be negotiated by Jordan, Iraq, Syria and Saudi Arabia." It was not clear whether territory from Iraq would also be included. Palestinians remaining in the West Bank -- no mention of Gaza was made -- would have limited autonomy under a "Municipal Palestinian Authority," but would be "encouraged" to emigrate to the Palestinian state. The handout states that, "the plan would be carried out under the auspices of the United States...."

Cohen on his Plan: What's Not to Like?

14. (C) Cohen claimed that a Likud Central Committee majority supports the plan. He claimed that most Central Committee members are against the roadmap and that at least 1,000 of the 3,000 members had supported his campaign against the roadmap before the cabinet had approved it with the 14 reservations. Eldor asserted that Cohen could get 70 MKs to support the plan. Cohen noted that he met with FM Silvan

Shalom four times to discuss the plan. (Note: Cohen's brother serves as an assistant to Shalom. End Note.) Shalom, Cohen claimed, told him that Jordan's King Abdullah is aware of the plan and had "inquired about its details." Cohen claimed he met with the head of Jordanian intelligence, Mansour, about the plan. (Note: The head of intelligence in Jordan is General Sa'ad Kheir. Cohen is most likely referring to retired Jordanian General and peace activist Mansour Abu Rashid. End note.) He said that he sent the plan to Labor leader Shimon Peres and is awaiting a meeting with him. He also asked Russian immigrant and MK Natan Sharansky to help him set up a meeting with Russian President Putin. When asked what PM Sharon thought about Cohen openly and vigorously promoting his own peace plan, Cohen replied that Sharon had given him an unofficial "green light" to promote the plan.

15. (C) Cohen claimed that the mayor of the Israeli Arab village of Taybeh and moderate Israeli Arabs support his plan as well, but Cohen could not remember the mayor's name. Cohen and his colleagues noted that it was difficult to debate the plan since it provides for a Palestinian state -- an even larger one than the Palestinians would have now. Eldor asserted that the idea "is sound." He suggested that the United States be "a leader in promoting the plan."

Uzi: I've Got the Power

16. (C) Uzi Cohen and his colleagues repeatedly stressed the importance of the Likud Central Committee in determining Likud policy and in electing Likud representatives, including the prime minister. Madmon noted that Sharon is not always "in line" with the Likud rank and file and that the Central Committee influences Likud and the public. Eldor added that the Central Committee wields influence on Sharon, the Israeli public and even the United States. Cohen advocated that U.S. government officials bypass normal GOI channels and meet with members of the Central Committee on peace process issues. He underlined that "in Israel, politics is different..." and that the United States should start a dialogue with the Central Committee, even if only unofficially. Eldor repeatedly turned to Poloff to stress Cohen's stature in the Central Committee, his influence over members and his "charisma." At one point, Eldor declared that Cohen could call any minister any time and receive an appointment the next day. Madmon suggested that Cohen lead a group of Central Committee members to meet with President Bush.

Who's Afraid of Uzi Cohen?

17. (C) Aside from U.S. government meetings with the Central Committee, Cohen stressed the importance of his meeting with U.S. officials, beginning with Ambassador Kurtzer, to discuss his plan. He noted that he was planning to meet with the ambassadors from a number of countries. Eldor said that Cohen would like to meet with President Bush. Cohen produced a letter from the PM's office responding to his request for assistance in arranging for a meeting with the President. The PM's office politely explained that this was not possible. Eldor asked for Embassy assistance in arranging for Cohen to meet the President and, noting "the type of man" Cohen is, declared that "by hook or by crook," and with or without Embassy support, Cohen would see the President. Poloff said these requests would be conveyed to the Embassy. Cohen stressed that timing was crucial and complained that setting up meetings through the proper channels goes slowly. As if to highlight competition for President Bush, Cohen pointed out that an American colleague had offered to arrange a meeting for him with Senator John Kerry, but that Cohen had declined. Cohen asked Poloff if he could issue a press release that he had met with U.S. Embassy officials about the plan. Poloff replied she would prefer the meeting not be publicized as it was an informal discussion.

Comment

18. (C) Uzi Cohen is undoubtedly a strong Likud Central Committee operator, and, as described by the major daily "Ma'ariv," a Likud "power broker." He defies conventional channels of political debate and has no compunction in inserting himself into any and every forum of public discussion. In February, Cohen's permanent pass to the Knesset was revoked after he reportedly threatened Knesset Speaker and Likud member Reuven Rivlin with "a political death certificate." This threat followed Rivlin's decision to ban Likud Central Committee members from Knesset committee debates, complaining that they disrupted the meetings. Early in 2004, Cohen had demanded that he accompany Sharon to meet with President Bush. When the visit did not materialize, it

appears that Cohen decided to promote his own plan, both in the media and in Likud. Many in Likud and the public at large cringe from his tactics and persona. When Cohen accused Rivlin of acting out of revenge in revoking his Knesset pass, Rivlin remarked to Ma'ariv: "Who is he anyway, that I should take revenge on him? Why should I pay him any attention? He should never have been given a permanent pass to begin with." PM Sharon, on the other hand, may benefit indirectly from Cohen. When compared to the likes of Cohen and others in Likud's Central Committee, Sharon appears moderate, reasonable, and benevolent.

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